

the SURVIVAL *garden*

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“The home or kitchen garden is the most important and often the most profitable area on the farm, or the village, city, or suburban lot, because when properly managed it may be made to supply an astonishingly large variety and quantity of produce at far less than the same quality and quantity of purchased food would cost.”

The above quote is from *Farm Knowledge*, Revised Edition, 1919, published by Doubleday, Page & Company. The statement is as true today as it was when my father

ordered the four-book group from Sears, Roebuck and Co. At the time, the United States was emerging from World War I and one of the backup programs had been its War Gardens effort. During World War II everyone who had even a small back yard was urged to plant a Victory Garden. Folks who weren't much on gardening deemed it their patriotic duty to join in and were surprised at what they could produce from their gardens. Longtime gardeners took it all in stride.

Regarding our present global situation, it looks like we are again going to be involved in a lengthy struggle to conquer forces that would destroy our way of life or, at the very least, alter it. Déjà vu. Will we survive this onslaught? You betcha! We

Americans are experienced in survival techniques and moreover we have the responsibility of passing on our knowledge of basics to a younger generation.

Food is always of primary concern to everyone. Most of the food we see in our supermarkets is delivered by the trucking industry and, if there is a breakdown in transportation, empty shelves will begin appearing. Nothing sparks panic like a food or water shortage. Just observe how folks stock up when a disastrous weather condition threatens and some people buy things they wouldn't buy otherwise.

A well supplied pantry back at the beginning of the 20th century and before was not only a compliment to the lady of the house, but it was a

Diversify your garden to include different kinds of vegetables that will give a surplus to can, freeze, or dehydrate.



necessity. Over the years we have grown away from this quaint dependency (Too much work!) and substituted one-stop-shopping at a supermarket.

“Be prepared” has never been more significant than now. If you live in a city where there are vacant lots, find out who owns them and strike up an agreement to use them for Survival Gardens. Band together with some neighbors and work out a plot plan. It’s amazing what a group of cooperating gardeners can do. No doubt there’ll be some experienced folks present who can give good advice as to improving soil, when and what to plant, cultivation, etc. If no one has the necessary knowledge, call on the government’s Cooperative Extension Service. They are located in every county and parish and have mountains of pamphlets dealing with plants, insect control, plant diseases, etc.

Those of us who already have backyard gardens or larger need to tighten up and make plans to harvest even more from our gardens than usual. To get the maximum amount of produce we should make a list of plants that give us the best return for time and effort spent raising them. Discard the ones we are not especially fond of. If eggplant is not a favorite, give the space to something else. Just because everyone in the neighborhood raises eggplants doesn’t mean you have to follow suit.

Most vegetable plants in our gardens have similar requirements for crop production. Any garden needs plenty of sunlight, and a minimum of six hours is considered essential. Otherwise, plants won’t do their best. If the garden spot is surrounded by tall trees, buildings, or solid fences, there’s too much shade. Plants may grow, but they will be spindly and the harvest slim.

Good soil is an absolute must. If you have a garden to which you have been adding compost, well-rotted



Top: Enjoy fresh green beans from the garden, but put the excess away for a rainy day. **Middle:** Be sure to grow some Dixie butterpeas. They have a great, buttery flavor and are preserved like any other lima. **Bottom:** When you see your surplus tomatoes in the form of catsup, sauce, stewed tomatoes, whole, juice, etc., it’s mighty satisfying and worth every bit of time and effort.



If you have room for small fruits such as berries, blueberries, or grapes, select varieties suited to your climate. Rabbiteye varieties of blueberries thrive almost anywhere and Concord grapes still seem to be the hardiest.

manure, and other organic matter, hooray for you. You're in tune with your soil. If you're starting a new garden from scratch, a few problems may confront you. It would be wise to dig up the area, discard all grass, weeds, and roots and take soil samples to your local county extension agent for soil tests. You can then get advice as to what to do in case improvement is necessary. Less than desirable soil is not hopeless. It can be greatly helped by digging in organic matter (leaves, lawn clippings, pine needles, etc.) and avoiding harsh chemicals that kill earthworms. The ideal garden soil should be loose and loamy and have a pH of 6.0 - 8.0.

Gardens should be located with a view to moderate drainage when wet seasons occur. A slight slope will usually take care of the matter. Also, if long dry spells are expected, a garden should be within easy reach of a water source.

Consider your space and make the most of it. The following vegetables are generally considered as good yielders and will not only produce

plenty of fresh vegetables but there'll be plenty to can, freeze, or dehydrate.

Tomatoes. They're among our most versatile and best loved vegetables. An industry has been built around tomatoes. They're canned whole, diced, stewed, used in everything from chili to pizza sauce, mixed into salsa, sliced in salads, dehydrated—you name it. Tomato reigns and the recipes keep coming.

Tomatoes are not hard to grow if one follows some simple rules. Whether you buy plants or raise your own plants from seed, be aware that not every tomato variety does equally well in all parts of the country. Varieties that are recommended for hot humid areas are the best bet for our part of the United States (Zone 8, Southwestern Arkansas). Seldom do we have a summer without drought and soaring temperatures. We don't waste space with varieties recommended for cooler areas. Also, notice initials such as VNT, VFFNTA, etc., listed along with the names of varieties. These initials mean the plants are resistant to certain diseases and problem. For instance, "N" means

good resistance to nematodes, those ever present, microscopic, worm-like pests that live in the soil and can cause havoc with tomato plants as well as others. (Seed catalogs always give a list of initials and their meanings.)

Some of the varieties that have done well in our area are *Arkansas Traveler*, *Quick Pick*, *Thessaloniki*, *Celebrity*, *Park's Whopper*, and *Supersteak*. One that performed especially well in 2001 was *Super Fantastic*. We also took some suckers from this one in midsummer, rooted them in water, and planted them in early August to stretch our tomato season. The new plants began bearing in late summer and continued until frost.

Don't forget the small tomatoes generally referred to as "cherry tomatoes." They are among the heaviest bearers of all and are great for making tomato juice and preserves or to eat fresh from the vine. *Sweet Million* is a favorite of ours as it bears until frost and has wonderful flavor.

Beans. Another tasty vegetable with a variety of uses. Generally,

beans are either bush type or pole. Bush beans mature quicker, but pole beans will give a larger harvest over a longer period of time. Personally, I prefer to plant pole beans as the pods are easier to pick, pods are cleaner, and their trellises provide afternoon shade for shorter plants during hot weather. Pole beans are space savers.

Bush varieties that have performed well for us include *Buttergreen*, *Venture*, *Blue Lake*, *Romano*, and *Shamrock*. Pole beans of exceptional yield have been *Kentucky Wonder*, *Romano*, *Blue Lake*, and *Kentucky Wonder Wax* (yellow colored).

Let's not forget other beans of delicious flavor. There are lima beans (both bush and pole), soybeans, field peas (often called cowpeas), asparagus beans (pole)—the list is long. Best of all, beans are easy to grow and will give you a good return for your time and effort.

If you live in a part of the country where it is practical to grow beans recommended for drying, you can raise varieties hard to find in stores. Pods mature almost all at once and beans can easily be separated by hand from the dry pods. Be sure that beans are completely dry before storing in clean airtight jars. If there are signs of weevils or any other tiny bug, try freezing the beans for a few hours before storage. Due to summer humidity, we don't try to grow beans for drying but instead buy certain varieties we like and store them with a bay leaf or two in the jars. Bay leaves are also good to use when storing other dry foods—pasta, peas, grits, corn, rolled oats, etc.

Peppers. Every garden should have several types of peppers—another easy-to-grow vegetable. Peppers are an essential part of many recipes ranging from salads to soups and they have a taste range from sweet to yowee! Colors of mature sweet peppers range from ivory, green, yellow, orange, red, and purple to chocolate. These are particularly desirable when



Peppers range from hot to sweet and all have their place in the scheme of cooking. Plants will bear until frost if given some TLC.

one wants to show off a bit with a specially prepared meal. Hot peppers have a wide color spectrum, too, but must be used with caution.

As a general rule, pepper plants will stand heat and humidity better than some other plants. If temperatures stay above 100° F. for several days the plants will slow down on production, but will make a comeback when weather cools. Some of our best blocky varieties have been *Bell Boy Hybrid*, *California Wonder*, and

Albino. Cubanelle types include *Gypsy Hybrid*, *Aconcagua*, and *Aruba*.

One should always have some hot peppers on hand to give some zip and variety to dishes where it is appropriate to use them. Jalapeno peppers, available in both hot and mild types, are prolific bearers as well as some smaller peppers such as *Tabasco* and *NuMex Sunrise*. Not a great deal of space needs to be devoted to hot peppers, as a little goes a long way.



Herbs play a big part in seasoning and should be a part of every garden. Garlic may be planted along fences or other spots not needed for other plants. This photo shows sweet basil leaves ready for the dehydrator and the garlic bulbs dug from one clump of garlic.



Left: Most of us don't have room for large vining plants such as pumpkins, but they, as well as winter squash, are always available in the fall on roadside stands. Canned pumpkin makes delicious pies, cookies, and cakes. **Right:** Nothing is more enticing than home canned fruit and preserves. In this photo, it's canned pears and pear honey. Don't overlook local orchards as a source of supply. If you have room for a few fruit trees, select those best suited to your area. It may seem like a long term investment, but it's certainly worthwhile.

Seasoning plants. Those of us who love food seasoned with something besides salt and pepper are sure to grow some herbs or garlic in our gardens.

Nothing peps up a roast like bits of garlic cloves tucked in here and there. Garlic is a blessing to the kitchen and is very easy to raise as hardly any pests attack it. It flourishes in the garden and may be grown alongside fences out of the way of other crops. When the plants go dormant in the summer, bulbs may be dug and hung up in mesh bags in a cool room to be used when needed. Where winters are not severe, plants will begin their cycle of growth putting up new leaves as weather cools down in the fall and showers begin. We often use fresh garlic leaves to season food during winter and early spring.

Raising one's own herbs just adds to the fun of gardening. Not only can leaves be used fresh during the growing season, but they may be dehydrated, crumbled, and put in clean small jars for winter use. (Be sure to label and date.)

Pick out the ones you like and try your hand at raising them. There are a few that are a little finicky as to climate and soil, but most herbs will thrive under normal conditions if given some TLC. We grow plenty of sweet basil as that is one of our favorites. We also like thyme and summer savory. Seasoning plants add both to the preparation and pleasure of meals and they can be used with many dishes, and they're delightful to flavor vinegars. So, reserve a spot in the garden for some herbs. You'll be glad you did.

I have only touched on a few plants that will give a good account of themselves almost anywhere they are grown. Be familiar with your climactic and soil limitations and grow, grow, grow! Home grown produce free of pesticides and Lord-knows-what-else is a great defense and survival technique. Along with working in a garden come fringe benefits—quiet times to think, something accomplished, getting in tune with nature, fresh air, and exercise, and

then there's that well stocked survival larder.

Seed and garlic sources:

Tomato Growers Supply Co., P.O. Box 2237, Fort Myers, FL 33902

Johnny's Selected Seeds, RR 1, Box 2580, Albion, ME 04910-9731

Totally Tomatoes, P.O. Box 1626, Augusta, GA 30903-1626

W. Atlee Burpee, Warminster, PA 18974

Geo. W. Park Seed Co., 1 Parkton Ave., Greenwood, SC 29647-0001

J. W. Jung Seed Co., 335 S. High St., Randolph, WI 53957-0001

Other suggestions

1. If you are unfamiliar with preserving food, be sure to obtain a good guide to home canning, freezing, and dehydration (See Jackie Clay's article this issue for a great primer. *BHM's* anthologies are loaded with such articles.) One of the best books on the market is published by a long-time manufacturer of canning supplies. For a copy of the *Ball Blue Book*, send check for \$5.95 to: Alltrista Corp., Consumer Products Co., Dept. PK 42, P.O. Box 2005, Muncie, IN 47307-2005.

2. For dehydrating, we use an electric dehydrator. Living in a somewhat humid region, we find this more dependable than other methods. If you live in a drier climate, you may have good success with drying food outdoors. Also, some folks recommend oven drying.

3. All electric appliances, such as freezers, can be victims of power failure. It is a good idea to have backup in the form of a dependable generator. Otherwise, you may lose a considerable amount of food if power is off for several days. Get a generator that will produce power enough to support your *necessary* appliances.

4. If you are new to the idea of survival—and this doesn't necessarily mean folks who are moving to wilderness areas—*BHM's* eight anthologies will make a great reference library. Δ